Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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Hillary Clinton in Arkansas

By Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

In 1990, the *National Law Journal* ran profiles of "the 100 Most Influential Lawyers in the United States". Hillary Clinton was on the list, and for years she would publicly boast that the *Journal* had named her one of "the nation's 100 top lawyers". Finally, the editor of the *National Law Journal*, Patrick Oster, wrote to Arkansas' first lady – as she still was in 1991 – testily pointing out that the word "influential" is not synonymous with "top" or "best" – the latter two words used by Mrs. Clinton interchangeably.

By "influential" the *Journal*'s profile writer, Peggy Fisk, had meant a lawyer plentifully endowed with corporate and political connections, which Mrs. Clinton certainly enjoyed in Arkansas where she had become a partner of the Rose Law Firm in 1977, amid the dawn of her husband's political career as he began his terms as governor of the state. By the late 1980s, Hillary Clinton was sitting on the board of Wal-Mart, with the rest of Arkansas' business elite crowding her Rolodex. Hillary ignored Oster's letter of correction, instructing her staff to continue to use the word "best" in invoking the *Journal*'s profile. She continued to do so for years. Oster was still writing her a decade later about her misuse – including an editorial column in the *Journal* in 2000, when she was running for the U.S. Senate.

In fact, Mrs. Clinton was not a particularly good lawyer and would have had trouble making any honest list of the 100 best lawyers in Little Rock. In their political biography, *Her Way: The Hopes and Ambitions of Hillary Rodham Clinton*,

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Letter From South Carolina

The Black Primary

By Kevin Alexander Gray

Columbia, South Carolina

The press doesn't plainly say it, but South Carolina is the black primary. The more common expression is that the state "offers a glimpse into what's important to African Americans…" It might, because a third of South Carolina's population (1.3 million residents) is black. The majority of Democratic voters here are black, and in 2004 "non-whites" made up about 60 per cent of those who cast a ballot in the Democratic primary. Yet at this point in the accelerated Election 2008 story, after two debates in the state by candidates from both parties there's been a bit of race baiting, or "kick a nigger" politics as it is called down South, and a whole lot of posing – talking or acting like a friend while stabbing you in the back. Who's the bad guy (or gal) in the sad state of affairs is measured only by degree. What it amounts to is, as James Brown put it, "talking loud and saying nothing".

From what's not being said it is simple to gauge whom the candidates and their staffs aren't talking to. Everyday conversation in the black community here reveals the toughest issues facing blacks nationwide. The education system is failing their kids. Many can't afford to buy or keep their homes. Communities are zoned out of existence to make way for white urban pioneers. Minority business ownership is down. Bankruptcy is up. In overwhelming numbers kids are locked up or otherwise under state supervision. Many are brutalized by the police or by each other. Somewhere between 30 to 50 per cent of South Carolina black youth are unemployed. Half of all black mortgagors in the state are losing their homes to foreclosure. This is a social catastrophe. On the political stage, it's as if the catastrophe doesn't exist.

But if the realities of black life are of small concern to the candidates, race is not. For Democrats, South Carolina provides a place to do retail politics just enough to punch their card with the party's most loyal base. For Republicans, typically the state has helped candidates assert their conservative credentials, measured by how extreme they are on race.

As he did back in 2000, Arizona Senator John McCain hired state Rep. Rick Quinn, once editor of *Southern Partisan*, a white "heritage" magazine, as his spokesman in the state. At the height of that primary, Quinn's magazine ran a full-page photo of Abraham Lincoln with the words of his assassin, *"Sic Semper Tyrannis"*, under the picture. McCain was outplayed for the white supremacist vote by George W. Bush that year, which may be why he has so far avoided the most race-baiting politics this time. Others have filled the void. Almost as soon as he came south, former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani let it be known he believes flying the Confederate flag on government property "is a matter of states' rights." Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo spoke at a barbecue sponsored by the South Carolina chapter of the League of the South (LOS), a neo-Confederate group that had the event catered by Maurice Bessinger, famous for flying the battle flag and selling books defending slavery at his restaurants. At the close of his speech, Tancredo reportedly sang "Dixie" with men dressed in Confederate soldiers' uniforms.

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That blacks view the Republican Party with antipathy is no surprise. The surprise is that, beyond symbolism, the Republicans are not that much worse than the Democrats.

Illinois Senator Barack Obama, touted by *Time* magazine for having the courage to tell "inconvenient truths," used one of the oldest racial stereotypes in a recent speech to black South Carolina state legislators. "In Chicago, sometimes when I talk to the black chambers of commerce", he said, "I say, 'You know what would be a good economic development plan for our community would be if we make sure folks weren't throwing their garbage out of their cars.'" Translation: black people are dirty and lazy.

Obama's defenders claim he is saying aloud what blacks say privately. But presidential candidates aren't campaigning for a place in the conversation on the neighborhood corner or in the cut. Those same black state legislators whom Obama addressed had earlier released data showing that only 3 out of 10 black males and 4 out of 10 black females graduate from the public high schools in South Carolina, that 85 per cent of youth prisoners and 70 per cent of adult prisoners are black, and many did not have a high school diploma and were unemployed before their arrest and incarceration. Such problems aren't limited to South Carolina but are at crisis level in Illinois, New York, Ohio and across the country. Obama has nothing to offer as a solution.

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Nor does Hillary Clinton. This past March, while in Selma, Alabama, the New York senator confused speaking in ebonics – "Aww don't feel noways tired" – with "walking the walk and talking the talk." She did something similar at a luncheon at Al Sharpton's National Action Network conference in April. Her apparent aim on both occasions was to "out-black" Obama. In a speech at Rutgers, shortly after the Don Imus gaffe, she summoned the ghosts of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth. Her husband appropriated black icons like Martin Luther King Jr. right before he came down strong with his "pimp hand," telling blacks if King were alive "he'd be ashamed" of them. Hillary "acting black" may have been intended to remind some that her rival Obama – often compared to the Kennedys – "isn't black enough".

Hillary "acting black" may have been intended to remind some that her rival Obama – often compared to the Kennedys –"isn't black enough".

Hillary has yet to show her hand in South Carolina, but there is no question that she and the other Democrats have a master teacher. Back in '92, Jesse Jackson's wife Jackie told me Yasser Arafat remarked to her, "Where you sleep is where your politics lie". Most of the Democratic candidates sleep with the playbook of Bill Clinton. I tend to see Hillary as the Susan Stanton character in the movie *Primary Colors*. The 1998 film adaptation of Joe Klein's book is about an "unknown Southern governor running for the presidency with his strong, savvy and equally ambitious wife…" At one point the Bill Clinton-like character, Jack Stanton, tells his staff: "I don't want to give the sonovabitch the chance to make me the sonovabitch." In street slang that's called "flipping the script." It's what Don Imus did after his "ho" comment, deflecting blame onto hip-hop culture. Hillary may have flipped the script on Obama, leaving him to talk about what's wrong with black people.

Bill's classic examples of race-baiting include his infamous 1992 public backhands of Sistah Souljah and Jesse Jackson – just to let folks know he wasn't indebted to blacks – and his decision to make a high-profile rush to Arkansas to preside over the execution of Rickey Ray Rector, a brain-damaged black man who didn't even know he was being killed – just to let folks know he wasn't soft on crime (aka blacks). Obama told the *Times*: "I'm not interested in engaging in a bunch of Sister Souljah moments just for the sake of it. If I do that, it's not for effect but because it's what I really believe." It's a toss-up which is worse: that Obama raised the specter of dirty blacks to score a political point or that he really believes it.

Meanwhile, the Clinton legacy affects what's being said or not said today in more subtle ways. The joke that refuses to go away is that Bill Clinton was "America's first black president," even as his policies on due process, equal protection and equal treatment – in other words, civil rights – were horrible. No Democrat is challenging his initiative requiring citizens, mostly black, in public housing to surrender their Fourth Amendment or privacy rights, or his "one strike and you're out" policy under which public housing residents convicted of a crime, along with anyone who lives with them, are evicted without due process.

Former Senator John Edwards of North Carolina used Hurricane Katrina as his entrance ticket to 2008 campaign, but at a substantive level he seems incapable of addressing "the right of return" for the 250,000 displaced residents relocated after the storm. A "right of return" would require somewhere to live and work upon return. Many of the displaced were renters before the flood. Many have the kind of credit rating that disqualifies them for most private housing and some types of government assistance. New Orleans had the highest poverty/crime rate in the region before the storm, and many of the now displaced were unemployed. A significant percentage of the 250,000 have criminal records, or someone in their immediate family does, thus disqualifying them from public housing under Clinton's one strike policy even if forces in New Orleans weren't intent on eliminating public housing. Would Edwards or any of

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the other candidates support the repeal of the one strike policy? Would they support waiving or lowering credit requirements? Not one has come out for homesteading or granting people a home and a clean start.

For most black people, Hurricane Katrina isn't something that happened "down there". It reinforced what they witness close-up right now, in Columbia or in Cleveland. They know how people have to give up the car because even though they have a perfect driving record, they're still charged a higher insurance rate by reason of where they live or their credit history. They know how they have to choose between paying for medicine and paying the bills. They know how – if homeowners fall into bankruptcy – the insurance companies can either refuse to sell them homeowners insurance or raise the rate, which is what a homeowner needs the least. Many African Americans know too well that the "po' pay mo'", burdened with extraordinarily high interest on just about any purchase. Their kids are stuck in awful, segregated schools. If those kids don't graduate from high school, particularly if they are male, chances are they are going to jail, most likely for selling drugs. One felony drug charge is economic suicide, as many employers will not hire ex-felons. If an ex-felon is lucky enough to get a job, it often doesn't cover the basics. A student loan is out of the question. So the kid ends up back in jail. Many blacks also know that the problem isn't solved with more police with drug dogs, social workers and piss tests. They know how tenuous existence is. Social instability due to unemployment or gentrification is one thing. Massive foreclosures in the new subprime housing developments – where 50 per cent of new buyers are likely to lose their home within seven years, thus making the populations of those developments more or less transient – is the new other thing. An "affordable" development might have hundreds of houses, yet with the constant turnover, it's never a community in the truest sense.

So blacks have the choice of believing that the majority of people losing their homes are irresponsible deadbeats, or that subprime mortgages serve to enrich the builders, banks and developers and exploit working-class buyers. They can believe they are dirty, lazy and just need to pick up the garbage, or that there is redlining and a lack of economic development and equitable lending practices where they live. They can believe that the majority of black school-age kids are inherently, pathologically inferior, unable to learn (which translates into stupid, unappreciative of education and deserving of jail), or that the system stinks and needs restructuring.

The presidential aspirants mostly leave them alone to assign social, rather than merely personal, responsibility for those issues. At the Democrats' first debate in Orangeburg, South Carolina, only retired Alaska senator and ex-cab driver Mike Gravel dared to say the "war on drugs" is a sham. Among the Republicans, only libertarian Ron Paul has called the drug war foolish, failed and an affront to liberty. In a practical sense, ending it means taking on the hot potato issue of decriminalization. No top-tier, mid-tier or even fellow fringe candidate is stepping out on that one. And what of ending mass incarceration, sending inmates to prisons far away from their families, sometimes across state lines? Most Democratic candidates slam the Patriot Act; a few even call for its repeal. Yet, who would call for a roll back on enhanced police powers like no-knock warrants and the erosion of probable cause, which makes it easier to detain and search people, homes and cars? The deaths of Sean Bell, Amadou Diallo and Patrick Dorismond in New York, of 88-year-old Kathryn Johnston in Atlanta, and a host of others elsewhere are a result of unchecked power derived from the "war on drugs". In the case of 6-year-old Desre'e Watson of Florida, taken to jail in oversized handcuffs, charged with felonious battery on a school official, disruption of a school function, and resisting a police officer – all for throwing a temper tantrum – we have the ultimate symbol of the criminalization of blacks. Over the years, the age that kids are tried as adults keeps dropping. Once society adopts the mindset that childhood misbehavior is criminal behavior, anything goes.

It's an outgrowth of Rudy Giuliani's "zero tolerance" policing. There's not much chance that he or any Republican will get many black votes in the primary or general election. The question is whether any Democrat will return to South Carolina or any Southern state besides Florida after the primaries. Recent history suggests they won't, which makes the black primary even weightier. Although a majority of black Americans live in the South, the January 2008 primary here could be the only occasion that Democrats have to vie seriously for black votes – which underscores that what we've seen so far is a pantomime of politics.

It is not that the issues being emphasized – war, global warming, health care and immigration – are irrelevant here. Most blacks opposed the war before it started and register protest via the plummeting number signing up for the military. They are environmentalists when it comes to environmental racism, but they are more concerned with home heating than global heating; if warmer winters mean lower fuel bills, it's clear what will be the rational priority for most people. They support universal health care although being uninsured has never stopped them from going to an emergency room when push came to shove. And they are torn on immigration reform, especially as the mainstream has defined that as a Latino issue. Blacks don't live in the same neighborhoods with Latinos, don't speak the same language and often compete for the same jobs. A politics that links the Global War on Terror with the war on drugs; that perceives the environment as the places people live and health as the condition of their life; that asks not so much "are they insured?" as "can they survive?" and "will their kids have a future?"; that makes the connections between racism, economic oppression and labor exploitation at home and abroad – such a politics might speak to people. Instead, we're offered the politics of symbolism: the black candidate, the woman, the Chicano, the "two Americas" man trailed by a few other white guys hoping somebody makes a mistake.

Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 Rainbow campaigns were the last time blacks

(Gray *continued on page 6)*

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(Editors *continued from page 1)*

Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta Jr. tell the story about the *National Law Journal* and also probe her lawyerly skills when she was at Rose Law. She only tried five cases and confided to Vince Foster – another Rose Law partner – that she was terrified of juries. So Foster had to accompany her to court. Because of her lack of prowess in the courtroom, she had to make her way at Rose Law by working her connections as the State's first lady to bring in clients, and even then her annual partner's share was mostly below $100,000 – the lowest in the firm and very small potatoes for one of the hundred most influential lawyers in America.

The Clintons' joint income – at least the visible portion – was not substantial: the state paid Bill $20,000 a year, no doubt under the assumption he'd even up the score with kickbacks. So money was on Mrs. Clinton's mind. Her search for extra income led her into associations that were later to cause endless trouble.

First came the ties with Jim McDougall that were to flower into the Whitewater property speculation and later a huge federal investigation into that deal, unprofitable to the Clintons who had hoped – like many Americans – to make a big score in real estate and solve their money problems at a single stroke.

When things were looking bleak for the Clintons after the Arkansas voters threw Bill out in 1980 after his first term as governor (Arkansas had two-year gubernatorial terms until 1986), she fanned her friendship with James Blair, general counsel of Tyson Foods. Bill Clinton's Little Rock chief of staff, Betsey Wright, recalled that Hillary "loved Jim Blair. Blair was her money man". It was Blair who set up an account for Hillary Clinton with Refco, a small brokerage firm run by Robert "Red" Bone, Don Tyson's former bodyguard and a professional poker player. "Red" Bone got her into cattle future trades. She put up $1,000 and left the trading to Mr. Bone who's often assumed to have arranged the trades with Blair, to Mrs. Clinton's advantage. Nine months later, the $1,000 had swollen with miraculous speed into a profit for Mrs. Clinton of $99,000.

When Bill Clinton ran for the presidency in 1992, reporters noted a mysterious spike in the couple's net worth in the early 1980s and quizzed Mrs. Clinton about it. Her first untruthful explanation was that there had been a windfall in the form of an unexpected gift of cash from her parents. But, aware that the questions wouldn't stop, she issued ferocious order to her staff about any leakage of her tax records. She told them that if they released the tax records showing the commodity trades, they'd "never work in Democratic politics again".

The records were stored in the Clinton Campaign headquarters in Little Rock, in a locked room for which only Hillary, Bill and Betsey Wright had keys. Also in "the Box Room" under lock and key were details of Bill's sexual capers and Hillary's dealings at Rose Law. An internal '92 campaign memo, quoted by Gerth and Van Natta, cited 75 "problem files" in the materials in the Box Room, two-thirds of which related to them as a couple or to Hillary alone. When David Ifshin, the campaign's legal counsel, asked for the key to the room to assess the likely problems, Bill Clinton told him: "We can't open our closet, we'll get crushed by the skeletons".

Mrs. Clinton was not a particularly good lawyer and would have had trouble making any honest list of the 100 best lawyers in Little Rock.

But two reporters in particular kept pressing: Gerth of the *New York Times* and James Stewart of the *Wall Street Journal*. Gerth finally got evidence of the $99,000 profit on a $1,000 trade and confronted Mrs. Clinton. Shorn of the family gift story, Mrs. Clinton avowed that she'd spent her days poring over cattle prices in the *Wall Street Journal*, that the $99,000 was the fruit of these studies and that she'd quit commodity trading in 1980, after she'd got pregnant with Chelsea, because the trading "was too nerve-wracking". Unfortunately for this story, details later surfaced amid prosecutor Kenneth Starr's investigation during the Clinton presidency, showing that in 1981 Hillary had made a trade netting her $6,500 and she hadn't reported the profit to the IRS.

Amid the Starr probe, the Clintons encouraged the *Wall Street Journal*'s Stewart to do a book on what they saw as their unfair persecution on the Whitewater deal. As he researched this work, published as *Blood Sport*, Stewart took a hard look at the commodity trades and pressed Mrs. Clinton for an explanation for all the contradictory stories. Hillary blamed everything on her staff and told Stewart that her own statements should simply be "accepted at face value".

In the mid-1990s, federal special prosecutor Kenneth Starr's investigative team in Little Rock was headed by a veteran of the courtroom, Hickman Ewing Jr. Grilled by Ewing before a grand jury on July 22, l995, Mrs. Clinton used the words "I can't recall" in answer to 50 questions. Later, Ewing told Starr that he rated Mrs. Clinton's testimony as deserving an F Minus, and he wanted to indict the nation's first lady. He was contemplating a number of counts, headed by two major lines of enquiry. First came her handling of the commodity trades and her failure to report her profits to the IRS. Second came her conduct amid the collapse of Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan, owned by Jim McDougal. Relevant to this affair were Hillary Clinton's billings as a legal counsel to Madison Guaranty. These were germane to the question of whether Hillary was being truthful in denying she'd done any legal work for the bank. After many adventures, the records finally came into the hands of Starr's team and showed that Hillary Clinton had billed Madison Guaranty at the rate of $150 an hour, with a total of 60 hours of supposed work on the Castle Grande deal. The prosecutors had the billings but were never able to look at Hillary's time sheets. Her secretary removed them from the Rose Law Firm in 1992, and it's generally assumed the first lady destroyed them.

Webb Hubbell, a partner at Rose Law and one of Hillary's closest friends, fell from his eminence as deputy attorney general in Clinton's first term and was convicted and imprisoned on charges of padding by $394,000 his legal billings at Rose Law. Ewing was convinced that Hillary had been doing the same thing. He prepared an indictment. It was the most serious brush with disaster that Hillary ever faced. Paradoxically, she was saved by the indiscretions of her faithless mate. Even as Ewing was urging Hillary's indictment, Starr was delightedly fingering what he conceived to be the object that would doom Bill Clinton, the semen-stained dress retrieved from Monica Lewinsky's closet by Starr's team. The only

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thing the prurient Starr cared about was nailing Clinton for sexual misconduct, and so he told the disappointed Ewing that there would be no indictment of Hillary.

Even as Hillary Clinton was making trouble for herself and Bill in her legal and business dealings, she was reinventing Bill as a politician. Defeat in 1980 after his first two-year gubernatorial term was a cataclysmic event. Bill called it a "near death experience". According to Gerth and Van Natta, it was "the only time anyone has seen Hillary Clinton cry in public". Bill was inclined to throw in the political towel and go back to being a law professor in Fayetteville, where he would doubtless be roosting in tenured bliss to this day, plump and pony-tailed, fragrant with marijuana and still working his way through an endless roster of coeds. But in 1980, over a funereal breakfast of instant grits, Vernon Jordan brokered a deal: Bill Clinton would give up being a southern populist in the mold of Orval Faubus, six-term governor of Arkansas. Southern populism involved offending powerful corporations. Bill lost in 1980 because not only had he taken the un-populist course of hiking the rate on car registration, he'd angered Weyerhaeuser and Tyson Foods. So, for his comeback he would remake himself as a neoliberal. Hillary Rodham would give up insisting on keeping her maiden name and become Hillary Clinton. The man charged with supervising the Clintons' makeover was selected by Hillary: Dick Morris, a political strategist known for his work for Southern racists like Jesse Helms. Morris ultimately guided President Bill Clinton into the politics of triangulation, outflanking the Republicans from the right on race, crime, morals posturing and deference to corporations. As Hillary said in 1980, "If you want to be in this business, this is the type of person you have to deal with".

Bill Clinton duly pushed aside the *Playboy* centerfolds and pored over Dick Morris' polling data, trimming his positions to suit. He recaptured the governorship in 1982 and as a reward appointed his wife to head a special task force charged with reforming Arkansas' education system, at that time widely regarded as the worst in the country. The plan Mrs. Clinton came up with showcased teacher testing and funding the schools through a sales tax increase, an astoundingly regressive proposal since it imposed new costs on the poor in a very poor state while sparing any levies on big corporations. The plan went through. Arkansas' educational ranking remained abysmal, but Hillary won national attention as a "realistic Democrat" who could make "hard" choices, like taxing welfare mothers.

While enjoying this limelight, Mrs. Clinton was invited onto the board of Wal-Mart as the first woman director, the only Rose Law partner at that time to have accepted an outside position. She was also asked by Robert Mac Crate, the president of the American Bar Association, to head up a commission on how to implement a resolution by the ABA to increase the profile of women and minorities in the legal profession. Mac Crate told Gerth and Van Natta that Mrs. Clinton declined, saying that she didn't want gender equity to be linked with race. She prevailed. Two years later, she agreed to head an ABA commission examining the status in the legal profession. Issues of race were not to be scrutinized.

By 1987, Hillary was wearying of life as first lady of Arkansas and began to press her husband on the 20-year plan they had made long before, whose consummation would be a successful run by Bill for the U.S. presidency. Dick Morris was assigned the task of running polls on Bill's chances. Betsey Wright was charged with sizing up the "problems". Morris' news was grim. The Democratic Party was not sold on the prospect of the governor of Arkansas as their nominee in l988. Betsey Wright sat down with Bill and Hillary and read out to both of them a list of dozens of women Wright believed Bill had had some kind of fling with during his gubernatorial years. Bill's head sank into his hands, and he mumbled, "I'm not going to run for president and I don't want to run for re-election as governor either". As Wright recalled later, Hillary stood up and cried, "If you're not gonna run for re-election, I'm gonna run". "Okay", said Bill, he'd run again. It was Hillary's call.

The next four years were spent gearing up for the White House run and trying to bury Bill's past. Amid these efforts Hillary made two huge mistakes, which haunted the Clintons throughout the 1992 campaign and their White House years. Clinton's opponent in the 1990 governor's race was Sheffield Nelson, a Little Rock lawyer. Nelson had accumulated a dirt file on Bill, detailing his sexual capers and the couple's Whitewater real estate transactions. But he never used this material in the campaign. Nonetheless, in 1990 Hillary Clinton publicly excoriated Nelson, calling him "a vindictive and very bitter man". The reason for Hillary's assault was that Nelson, in the climactic weeks of the race, had saturated the airwaves with a series of campaign ads charging Clinton with being a tax-and-spend Democrat. The ads had some effect, and the Clintons had to borrow $100,000 from the Jackson Stephens-controlled Worthen Bank to mount a counteroffensive ad campaign of their own. Nelson, seething at Hillary's onslaught, duly became bitter and vindictive and, as Clinton's presidential campaign got under way, he began to leak ripe details from the file he had kept closed in l990.

Her second mistake also came in 1990, when Jim McDougal was facing trial over the collapse of Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan. In his hour of need, he asked Bill to testify as a character witness in his trial. Though Bill was willing to do so, Hillary was adamant that he should avoid any association with McDougal. She successfully persuaded Bill to decline. McDougal was acquitted, but he never forgave the Clintons for their disloyalty. He too began to leak damaging stories about Whitewater to Gerth and other reporters from his rusting trailer in Arkadelphia. Thus, even as she kindled her husband's presidential bid, Hillary helped spark the fires of financial and sexual scandal that almost destroyed his presidency.

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(Gray *continued from page 3)*

and progressives had a significant policy and institutional effect on American politics. The Rainbow movement brought a diverse coalition together on an agenda predicated on universal human rights and peace. That coalition brought issues of race, gender and sexual orientation into an analysis of class and American power. It opposed the proliferation of nuclear weapons and demanded restrictions on nuclear energy. It supported the property rights of small family farmers and black farmers, as well as the rights of migrant workers and workers' rights in general. It brought people into the political process and spurred a nationwide increase in black elected officials. Many of those newly appointed or elected officials carried a platform that opposed apartheid in South Africa, supported human rights for the Palestinian people, and sought peaceful relations with Cuba and Central America.

The Rainbow challenge had an effect on both political parties. On the Republican side, it prompted a top-down approach to race politics with the ascensions of Clarence Thomas, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and others. It's inspired Bush's "faith-based" schemes. On the Democratic side, it propelled the backlash Democratic Leadership Conference (DLC), dedicated to reversing the political aspiration of the Jackson's coalition. Among today's front-runners, Hillary Clinton is a DLC star, chair of its American Dream Initiative, touting free markets, balanced budgets and middle-class know-how. Obama's political action committee, the Hope Fund, has raised money for ten DLC Senators, or half of the group's pres-

African Americans have gone from a "freedom movement" to the edge of no longer being free.

ence in the Senate.

At a recent speech in Hampton, Virginia, Obama mentioned the "simmering discontent" in the black community. He got that one right. Even with more black officials than at any time in history – most of them Democrats – many African Americans feel that things have been moving in the wrong direction for a while now. From high infant mortality rates to low life spans, the black misery index is acute. The effect of the huge number of black citizens under the direct control of the state through the criminal justice system, so much so it has led to diminished voting rights and participation, cannot be overstated. African Americans have gone from a "freedom movement" to the edge of no longer being free. And there is Obama, providing cover for those who blame the victims or prodding the victims to blame themselves. There is Hillary, promising a restoration, the flimflam of Clintonism as the blacks' best friend.

I've always believed liberation must be won outside the confines of party politics. But it would be unwise to ignore what candidates are saying or not saying, since they can affect how and if you live. It is elementary in politics to demand that those vying for black votes address "what's important to African Americans" in a meaningful way. So far, the most blacks have got are race gestures and a blind eye. CP

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